



Exploring the magic of flavour

(and other love stories)



This month we introduce our new food contributor, Karen Dudley of Woodstock's The Kitchen – a purveyor of heritage soul food, this down-to-earth foodie has already won over America's First Lady. We hope you're next...

'My mom's shoulders curl forward with pleasure when she eats something pleasing. All my life she has been adamantly inviting me to share in her experience of what is good: the sandwich for the top of the mountain; a buttery pastry in the back of the car on the way to horse-riding in Hout Bay.

I have come to understand that this love of sensual pleasure (feet in a stream, the sweetest apricots, crisp cold cherries) is most often connected to the simplest flavours. It is a recognition of what is delicious that has fuelled my journey as a cook. I have learned how to seek out goodness and to recreate these flavours in my cooking!

My mom Ruth grew up in De Smidt Street, de Waterkant before the forced removals of the Group Areas Act, watching fishermen coming up from the docks selling 2c crayfish sandwiches.

My father Bernard grew up in Genadendal herding cows, learning Latin declensions, picking tomatoes in the *paglande* (leaseholding) for school lunch and bringing King Edward Potatoes and Australian Browns (onions) to the Sir Lowry Market (where the Good Hope Centre now stands) every Saturday morning.

For so long, being a mixture of cultures was regarded as a thing of shame. Growing up, I realised that being the carrier of many cultures was also a source of richness, endless surprise and possibility! I quietly chose to disregard laws surrounding race, conventions and rules. I realised that I would need to forge my own identity. I was all these flavours!

With a gift to seek out the most delicious morsel, and to reach for the thread of flavour connecting us all, I am a natural sponge: listening, reading, devouring... I interpret the purity of my findings into food that we can all share. I cherish traditions and celebrate them in the food that we love to eat today.

At my shop in Woodstock, The Kitchen, I get to articulate my joy in the rich tapestry of flavour and texture that we create every day. Flavours must be simple and clean. They must have a distinguishing feature but also "play nicely with their friends".

The mustard dressing in the Mung Bean Salad is carried by the simplicity of the Gazpacho Salad which is contrasted by the Miso Broccoli, which is great beside the Egg Fried Rice, which is surprisingly good with the hummus, which becomes extra-ordinary beside the Beetroot Apple Coriander Salad!

It's immense fun for me to play foodologist, hearing from others the flavours that ignite memories and transport them to another place; flavours that bring deep pleasure or the zing of inspiration or something utterly different – the giddy recognition of new love.

One of my greatest pleasures is making a Love Sandwich as an act of pure service, humility and devotion. Love is all about reaching for what the Other needs, rather than forcing love on our own terms.

The simple act of making a sandwich for someone can be intimate: it demands a little space and time in which you carefully hold your Eater in mind, listening to what that person might need and enjoy: sweet and tangy pickles? Mayo? Tomatoes? Red onion? Avocado? Dressed leaves? Something cool and crispy? Something plain? Receiving this vehicle of love can be transformative!

On one day I may long for a crispy baguette with cold butter and thinly sliced gammon with all its honey mustard stickiness and maybe just one well-dressed leaf. On another day I might yearn for a Geronimo salami sandwich with grilled aubergine, Danish feta and wild rocket. Sometimes, it's the salty purity of anchovies with thickly sliced tomatoes releasing their juice into homemade bread I'm after.

Making a Love Sandwich creates a moment in which to pay attention to the ones we love."



In this series, we'd like to invite you to explore the melting pot of South African flavours with us and then bring them home to your own table. But first...

How to build a Love Sandwich

Remember that any sandwich can become a Love Sandwich when it's offered with loving attention and gentle consideration, always bearing the Eater in mind.

- 1 Cut the roll in half but not all the way through.
- 2 Scoop out the top half of the roll to accommodate the filling and to cut out excessive breadiness.
- 3 Spread pesto or your favourite spread on both sides of the sandwich.
- 4 Spread the main filling on the roll (grilled chicken, sliced sausage, rare roast beef, grilled aubergine, bacon, gammon, salami), covering the bottom generously.
- 5 Next, a drizzle of mayonnaise.
- 6 Then sliced pickles. You may want to add your favourite relish or mustard, or caramelised onion or pickled peppers.
- 7 Now for the salad component: sliced tomatoes, Love Potion (dressing), and finely sliced red onion.
- 8 At this point you could add extra avo or Danish feta or crunchy slaw or pickle.
- 9 Then, with tongs, fit a generous amount of salad leaves into the roll cavity above the filling. You'll need the tongs; fingers just seem ungainly at this point.
- 10 Now, drizzle a little vinaigrette on the leaves.

The next critical stage of construction I call The Benediction. The sandwich, which until now may have been a relatively ordinary one, is about to be transformed! Place the now very full sandwich on a board. With a long smooth-ended bread knife, gently hold down the filling while you bring the top of the sandwich over it, your left hand cupping the sandwich to enclose the filling. Now press down gently with your hand to tenderly introduce all the ingredients in the sandwich to each other. The mayo is greeting the chicken, the tomato and Love Potion are becoming acquainted, and the vinaigrette is being absorbed slightly by the bread. I say a little blessing over the sandwich and its Eater, sending it on its way to do its good work.



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A bit more on Karen...

Karen has lived and honed her culinary skills in Washington DC and London but now lives in Woodstock, Cape Town – down the road from The Kitchen – with her husband and two children. A compulsive feeder and communicator, she revels in being part of the urban community of Woodstock. Since the incredible success of her first recipe book, she wears more lipstick and less sensible shoes, and is quite powerless before her need to share her passion for food and its power to touch people. In fact, her reach has even extended to America's First Lady, Michelle Obama! "On the morning of 28 June, I received a call from an aide on Michelle Obama's team telling me she might be visiting for lunch. I gathered my troops and briefed them about the day: we were to expect about 25 guests with her entourage... Next thing, some very large vehicles with Washington DC number plates pulled up outside. There was a strange excited silence as we waited. And then Michelle Obama arrived! I'm still moved by the cleverness and generosity of her visit, and her powerful endorsement of what we are about and what she's about." Karen also sits on the board of the Children's Radio Foundation in Cape Town, and is involved in so much life around her. She is still the queen of the Love Sandwich!

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A taste of what's to come

Perhaps if I share some of my favourite flavours, you'll get a feel for who I am...

- Simple melted butter and castor sugar French crêpes.
- The Gremolata trinity of parsley, garlic and lemon.
- Pork crackling with clear apple relish.
- My Sweetheart's toasted cheese, tomato and red onion sandwich.
- Salty/sour/tangy/sweet rhubarb, ginger chocolates.
- Date pilaf with spiced almond.
- The condensed milk ice blocks of my childhood.
- Cardamom.
- Warm potatoes in any form.
- My mother's tomato bredie.